Unit .24

Session .02

Jesus Feeds a Multitude

Scripture

John 6:4-14, 26-27,32-35

4 Now the Passover, a Jewish festival, was near. **5** So when Jesus looked up and noticed a huge crowd coming toward him, he asked Philip, "Where will we buy bread so that these people can eat?" **6** He asked this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. **7** Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread wouldn't be enough for each of them to have a little." **8** One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, **9** "There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish—but what are they for so many?" **10** Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place; so they sat down. The men numbered about five thousand. **11** Then Jesus took the loaves, and after giving thanks he distributed them to those who were seated—so also with the fish, as much as they wanted. **12** When they were full, he told his disciples, "Collect the leftovers so that nothing is wasted." **13** So they collected them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces from the five barley loaves that were left over by those who had eaten. **14** When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This truly is the Prophet who is to come into the world." … **26** Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. **27** Don't work for the food that perishes but for the food that lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set his seal of approval on him." … **32** Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, Moses didn't give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. **33** For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." **34** Then they said, "Sir, give us this bread always." **35** "I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again.

Intro Options

Main Point:
Jesus teaches us to meet the physical and spiritual needs of others.

Option 1

Write on your board: "Worst. Idea. Ever."

Tell the students this phrase is the name for a skit, vignette, or drawing they should make. It could be a commercial for a foolish idea for a product or service; it could be a foolish idea someone makes with their friends; it could be a terrible idea for a song. The sky's the limit, though they should try to make it funny; we're not looking for snarkiness as much as levity.

Let them prepare their "Worst. Ideas. Ever." Then let them share them. After everyone has gone, ask them what they think of the following: imagine there are 10,000 hungry people (maybe at a big concert, or a professional sports event). One guy comes forward and suggests maybe he pass his lunch around so that everybody can have some. Would the students put this idea in the "Worst. Idea. Ever." category?

Point out that this idea is very close to what will happen in today's lesson: 5,000 men, plus women and children, will be hungry; Jesus will take up Andrew's offer to pass one boy's lunch around to them. And it will work. So much for "Worst. Idea. Ever."

Option 2

As a large group, brainstorm about some of the needs people might have. Make a list. They could be big or small, general or specific: food, security, shelter, company, purpose, community, significance, a working car, the patch in their tire to be fixed, a good playlist, etc.

Break students into smaller groups to make skits. Have each small group choose one of the needs you listed. They should now make three short skits. In each skit, someone will have the need you assigned them. In the first skit, someone will try to meet their need, but that person will fail. In the second skit, someone will try to meet their need and succeed. In the third skit, someone will try to meet their need and way more than succeed.

Let them prepare and show the skits. Ask how each skit made the would-be helper appear; in which skit did the helper appear best?

The more abundantly someone helps, the more impressive he or she seems. In today's lesson, Jesus will provide the physical needs of over five thousand people, but He will do so in super-abundance. His super-abundance provision shows how super-glorious our Jesus is.

TEACHING PLAN

Read John 6:4-10.

Jesus' fame and popularity were growing every day as crowds flocked to see Him heal the sick. But Jesus thought of the people's hunger on this occasion. Food is a basic human need, so hunger is not an ailment to be healed but a requirement to be filled. Not only did Jesus concern Himself with the people's hunger, He took the initiative to meet their need.

Stop and think about this for a moment. Jesus, the Son of God, the divine teacher and healer of humanity, on His way to the cross to die for the forgiveness of sins, noticed others' physical needs and made plans to meet those needs. Too often we think Jesus cares exclusively about souls and we gloss over the fact that Jesus also cares for our physical needs. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed the fact that God, who feeds the birds and clothes the flowers of the field, cares for and provides for the physical needs of His children (Matt. 6:25-34).

Jesus' example teaches us that we too ought to care for the needs of people, especially since that is what God has done for us in Jesus. God saw us in our helpless state and moved toward us. He sent Jesus to meet our needs and restore us to right relationship with Him.

- **What are some reasons we fail to notice the needs of others?**
- **What are some reasons we might refuse to show compassion to others? Are any of these justified? Why or why not?**

Jesus could have fed all the people right away by speaking food into existence or turning the stones on the ground into bread. Instead, He invited others into His work! He asked Philip, one of His disciples who was a local, what they were going to do. Whatever they did, Philip knew it would be expensive. Andrew, another disciple, found a boy with a simple lunch that wouldn't go far.

All three of these people were powerless to feed the crowd, and they knew it. Jesus, however, knew what He was going to do. He knew how to feed the giant crowd, yet He still took the time to invite His disciples and the little boy into what He was about to do.

We often are the means through which God works and answers prayers. God certainly moves in mysterious ways, but He often provides for His people through His people as they love their neighbors. This could involve meeting needs by giving to someone in need, but it could also be helping to rebuild homes after a hurricane or helping a single mom by babysitting her kids.

- **What are some additional ways you and your group can serve others to meet their needs?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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John 6

4-10. Though the power and the miracle came through Jesus, it was carried out by the human hands and feet of the disciples. Jesus blessed the food but turned over the heavenly meal to the very men who had complained about the time, the lack of food, and the amount of people still sitting around them (Matt. 14:15,17). And before their very eyes, the five loaves and two fish became food for thousands. These were not snack-sized portions, either—the people ate and were satisfied!

The same men who attempted to come up with a very human and logical answer to their problem watched the miracle unfold over and over again as they handed out the food. And just in case they didn't fully appreciate Jesus' miracle, they gathered 12 baskets of leftovers. Each disciple had an entire basket of heavenly bread that wasn't even eaten. More than the manna that disappeared at the heat of each day, this bread sat in baskets as a visible reminder of God's provision.

11-14. Jesus multiplied the bread and the fish, and everyone ate until they were satisfied—and still there was more leftover. Imagine being one of the disciples with a basket in your hand, picking up the uneaten pieces of bread and marveling that you have more food now than when you began!

Jesus could have given them just enough to curb their hunger and taught them about contentment. He could have provided just enough for everyone to feel full and shown them His perfect provision. For what it's worth, Jesus could have not provided any food and used it as a teaching moment on fasting and feeding on the Word that comes from God (Matt. 4:4). But He did none of those this time. Jesus showed them all, including His disciples, that He has the power to provide abundantly, just as He came to give life abundantly (John 10:10).

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 88, DDG)

Social Concern

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the Spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Mic. 6:8; Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Thess. 3:12).

TEACHING PLAN

Read John 6:11-14.

The Bible is full of stories in which God takes little things and makes much of them through His power. The boy's lunch in this passage was pretty trivial. Barley was what the poor used to make their bread. Furthermore, loaves in that day weren't the kind of loaves we buy from the grocery store. Rather, they were more the size of biscuits, and the fish were probably small morsels of pickled fish used as a condiment. On top of that, the story tells us the number of men who were in the crowd was five thousand, not counting women and children. Five biscuits and some fish jam for over five thousand hungry mouths just wasn't enough. But Jesus does the impossible: He took a meager meal and multiplied it into a fantastic feast.

This is the nature of our God! What might seem insignificant becomes significant in His hands. Whether it be our time, our resources, our talents and gifts, there is nothing so small that God cannot use greatly. We sometimes can be hesitant to give what we have to God because we believe it isn't enough. But that way of thinking puts our confidence in what we have to offer. Like the boy, we can humbly submit what we have into the hands of Jesus, knowing that what we have to offer is never too meager for Him to make useful.

- **What are some areas in your life that Jesus could use to be a blessing to both you and others?**

Jesus performed an amazing miracle, but it must be noted that the same people He fed got hungry again the next day as they sought out Jesus. Imagine the best meal you've eaten. Regardless of the amazing taste, the cost, or how full you were after that meal, at some point you were hungry again. Here, Jesus teaches on this point.

Read John 6:26-27, 32-35.

The food we hunger for never fully satisfies, but this phenomenon doesn't just apply to food. The things of this world that we buy and build and look to for meaning eventually fade. The gnawing hunger that drives us keeps coming back, keeps demanding more, and is never satisfied.

Jesus told His hearers, and us, not to chase after things that perish but to go for the eternal bread that satisfies forever. The crowd was hoping for something like the manna that God provided for Israel in the wilderness (see Ex. 16). God fed and sustained His people daily for forty years with manna, a sweet bread that was found on the ground when they woke up each morning. The crowd was looking for a miracle like this, which they attributed to Moses, but they were searching for the wrong kind of bread. Jesus didn't come primarily to give bread but to be bread. He is the bread from God that lasts forever, satisfies our deepest hunger, and gives life. How do we get this bread? The crowd had the same question. Jesus' answer was simple: He is the Bread of life, so come to Him and believe in Him.

- **What are some ways we might come to Christ for the bread He can provide instead of the bread that He is?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus teaches us to meet the physical and spiritual needs of others.

John 6

32-35. Jesus upstaged Moses when He fed 5,000 men (plus women and children) from the meager supplies of five loaves of bread and two fish. The Jews understood the gift of manna to be Moses' miracle, but Jesus was clear that Moses was just the messenger who explained what the manna was (Ex. 16:15). The Father gave the gift of bread from heaven for His people (John 6:32).

Both Moses and Jesus were involved with miracles of bread being provided from heaven. On both occasions, the bread was nourishing. Both filled stomachs and strengthened hearts to believe God and the men He sent. But Jesus completed the lesson that began with Moses' manna when He claimed that He is the Bread of life (John 6:35).

Physical bread can fill anyone, from the poorest to the greatest, but it will not last. Jesus' bread at the feeding of the 5,000 was surely a miracle, but those who ate of it would be hungry again. However, this bread from heaven opened hearts to hear and believe the message about the Bread of life.

Activity

Break your students into groups of about three. Give each group a sheet of paper and a drawing utensil. Each group should now sketch a person who is in some kind of need. They may want to add a caption for explanation. It could be someone who needs a friend, someone who needs a ride, someone who needs a good way to spend her evening; you name it.

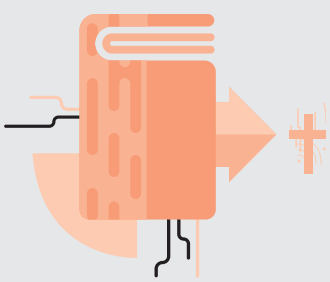
Collect all the drawings. Pass them back out at random to the groups; each group should have a different sketch from the one they made. They should now make a skit wherein that person's need is met either by Jesus or by Christians (or both!). For example, someone who needs a friend might find Jesus a sweet friend, or he might find a Christian buddy who loves him. They should try to make the skits as practical as possible; it'd be best if skits didn't show people winning the lottery or miraculously being healed (though these things are not outside Jesus' ability).

Let them prepare and show the skits. Point out afterward how the skits usually displayed either the first or the third point from the lesson. Either a Christian helped (which shows someone accepting Jesus' invitation to join Him in meeting others' needs), or Jesus Himself became the answer (which shows Him as the bread of life that satisfies us).

Consider how Jesus is the answer to our needs and how we can join His invitation to meet others' needs.

(p. 90, DDG) Christ Connection

When the Israelites were hungry in the wilderness, God provided manna from heaven. Jesus is the greater Moses, the One who not only provides bread from heaven but who also speaks of Himself as the bread who gives life to the world.



JESUS FEEDS A MULTITUDE

John 6:4–14

JESUS FEEDS A MULTITUDE

Jesus teaches us to meet the physical and spiritual needs of others.

JESUS CONNECTION

When the Israelites were hungry in the wilderness, God provided manna from Heaven. Jesus not only provides bread from Heaven but speaks of Himself as the bread who gives life to the world.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

COMPASSION – Recognizing the suffering of others and taking action to help.

HEAD

Why does Jesus ask His disciples to feed the people? How might this miracle increase the disciples' faith?

What kind of bread did the crowd want the next day? What kind of bread did Jesus offer them instead?

HEART

God saw us in our helpless state and moved toward us. He sent Jesus to meet our deepest need—to be saved from sin so we can have a right relationship with God—and He promises to meet every other need too. Why is it dangerous to only ask God to meet our physical needs? What does it look like when someone is more satisfied with Jesus than the things of this world?

Jesus taught the disciples the importance of trusting God to help them meet people's physical needs and involved them in the process. What are some reasons you fail to show compassion to others? Are any of these reasons valid?

HANDS

The first step in showing compassion toward others is simply being aware of what is going on around us. When you are out in public (school, the store, extracurricular activities), ask God to help you recognize the needs of others, understand how to help and act by meeting that need. It could mean picking up groceries that someone dropped, talking to a lonely neighbor or giving someone lunch money. It may be praying with a friend or cheering on a teammate who is having a rough practice. Look for 2–3 opportunities to show compassion this week.